New coachee study reveals the barriers to effective coaching

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Recent research offering a rare view from the coachee perspective has confirmed that, for the vast majority of coachees, coaching is successful. Digging deeper, the study made interesting discoveries about the barriers to effective coaching. Researchers found that 84 per cent of coachees said they had faced barriers along the way, with unclear development goals or lack of agreement with their coach as the most frequently-mentioned barrier.

Most existing surveys are of the views of the coaches, but this study, by the College of Business, Law & Governance at James Cook University (Australia) and the Institute for Employment Studies (UK), surveyed 644 industry professionals from 34 countries, who either had received or were currently receiving coaching. The researchers found that 89 per cent of coachees found coaching to be effective, while just 11 per cent said it was of limited use.

However, successful outcomes require confidence in the coach. The research found that the biggest single predictor of less effective coaching was difficulties with the coach. In addition, women are almost twice as likely as men to report the organisational culture as a barrier, particularly an unsupportive boss.

They found that the barriers differed for coachees from different regions. For coachees from outside Europe and Australia, personal issues affecting their readiness for coaching were the most prevalent. For example, the timing wasn't right, with respondents giving examples such as “too late in my career” or “going on maternity leave”. For coachees living in the UK and Australia, issues affecting their ability to engage with the coaching process were more common, for example, emotions getting in the way and feeling defensive.

The findings have been published as two papers within the conference proceedings from the 4th EMCC Research conference held last month in Paris.

Alison Carter, Associate Fellow at IES and co-author of the papers, said:

“We have empirically confirmed what everyone already ‘knew’: that coaching works. But the process of being coached is tough and not all employees expect this. We found that not all coachees are willing to put in the effort that is required.

“There is a widespread belief amongst coaches that 'barriers' are nothing to worry about: barriers are just issues that become part of the coaching conversation and the coach helps the coachee to overcome them. We were not satisfied with this and decided to find out how many coachees perceive they face barriers, what the most commonly encountered and which, if any, might adversely affect successful outcomes from their coaching.”

Anna Blackman, Senior Lecturer, James Cook University and co-author of the papers, said:

“Business coaching has become a popular tool for human resource management with a number of advocates making a variety of claims about its benefits and practice. Despite its popularity, until recently there has been little published systematic empirical research into business coaching. This study clarified factors that make coaching effective and should be included in the coaching process.

“Our findings challenge some existing assumptions. According to coachees the most important factors for a coach to have was experience in the coachee’s industry, being honest and communicating clearly. This contradicts the assumptions of many coaches that industry experience is not necessary.”

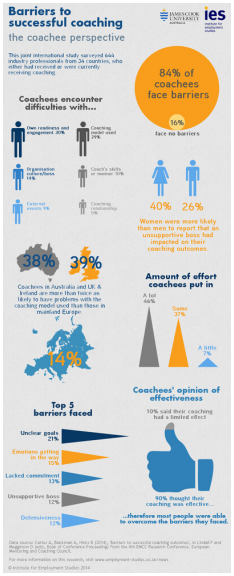
An accompanying infographic highlighting some key findings from the study has also been published online: http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/press/08_14.php

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Press Contacts
The authors are available for interview or to write feature articles about the study.

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Background information

The research was presented in the following two papers, at the EMCC Research Conference at Cergy-Pontoise University on 26-27 June 2014:

- Carter A, Blackman A & Hicks B (2014) Barriers to successful coaching outcomes
- Blackman A, Carter A & Hay R (2014) Coaching for Effectiveness: Initial Findings from an International Study

Press copies are available on request.

The papers were recently published in Book of Conference Proceedings from 4th EMCC Research Conference, Megginson D & Lindall P (Eds), by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), which can be purchased via the EMCC website:
http://www.emccbooks.org/book/book/2014-research-conference-book-duplicate

About the study
This is the first time IES and James Cook University (JCU) have collaborated on HR research. Drs Anna Blackman and Alison Carter met at an EMCC conference two years ago where they were both presenting findings of previous research studies. They realised they shared a common desire to test out empirically the various claims made about coaching in work settings. Following the enormous success of this international study the organisations expect to collaborate again on other topics.

There are many claims and myths about coaching outcomes that have been made by coaches and coaching associations. As a result of their study from the coachee perspective IES and JCU plan a series of papers to confirm or debunk these myths. The first two are being published at this time. Future papers will present evidence about successful coaching outcomes in terms of organisational support, coaching context, and the characteristics of a successful coach.

About the authors

Dr Alison Carter
Dr Alison Carter is an Associate Fellow at Institute for Employment Studies (IES) in UK where she leads IES' coaching research and consultancy area of expertise. She also writes, speaks and consults on a range of HR, OD and leadership development issues. Alison was a Director of EMCC (2003-2005), Co-Chair of the 2nd Harvard International Coaching Research Forum (2009) and is a Chartered Fellow of CIPD.

Dr Anna Blackman
Dr Anna Blackman is a Senior Lecturer in the College of Business, Law and Governance at James Cook University in Townsville, Australia. Dr Blackman's areas of expertise include business coaching, Human Resource Management, Business Management and Wellbeing. She is the Course Co-ordinator for the Graduate Certificate in Australian Rural Leadership for the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation and is a Queensland Councillor for the Australian Human Resources Institute.

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